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ABSTRACT

Procedures for revising a K-12 social studies program so that it includes thinking skill activities and for implementing the revised curriculum are discussed. Procedures are: the formation of a curriculum committee and sub-committees; current program assessment to determine needs regarding thinking skills; deciding on a rationale; selecting objectives; incorporating thinking skills into the objectives (with a focus on the cognitive domain as outlined in the six categories of Bloom's Taxonomy of Educational Objectives); determining the scope of the program; choosing the content; identifying and selecting instructional materials; and planning for program evaluation. To ensure that the revised curriculum is implemented in a manner that maximizes success, in-service teacher education workshops that focus on how to teach thinking skills must be conducted. The implementation process also involves determining whether computer assisted instruction is to be used and to what degree. Finally, a timetable for reviewing and assessing the revised curriculum is essential. (RM)

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Proposal
for
Revising Social Studies Curriculum
Grades K-12
Incorporating Thinking Skills Activities

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Abstract

The major problem afflicting current social studies curriculum is the absence of thinking skill activities. In addressing this concern, the proposal here calls for a thorough revision of the social studies curriculum in a nine step process: Soliciting community support (from which a curriculum committee and eight sub-committees are formed to carry out the entire curriculum process), planning to plan, deciding on a rationale, selecting objectives, mapping the content, determining the scope of the program, choosing the content, identifying and selecting materials and finally planning for program evaluation. This proposal discusses steps that are needed to implement the revised curriculum in a manner that maximizes success. To that end, it suggests an in-service thinking skill workshop for teachers. The implementation process also involves a determination whether computers are to be used as supplements to instruction materials, and to what degree. Finally, a timetable is essential for reviewing the curriculum to assess the degree of success through the identification of the revised curriculum's weaknesses, strengths and overall teacher/student response to the new approach.

Problem Identification

Thinking is that exercise of the human mind that is both ancient and challenging to contemporary psychologists and educators because of complexities involved in thought process. Understanding human cognition and thinking presented problems of inquiry long before man was sufficiently literate to record them. Though psychology has advanced immeasurably, much remains to be learned about the incorporation of thinking skills into contemporary Social Studies curriculum. Nonetheless, lacking full mastery for designing a thinking skill curriculum is hardly an excuse for not trying, which is why this proposal is being brought to life.

It is time that Social Studies courses prepare students to become critical thinkers and not vacuum cleaners for irrelevant information that are strictly committed to memorization. Training students to think, however, has much to do with the quality of the teacher's time and the material selected for instruction. To date, the evidence points to widespread teacher neglect of thinking skills in both learning activities. The reason: most are unfamiliar with the methods of teaching thinking skills, therefore, they don't (Beyer,1985:486). Consequently, most teachers limit their student's learning activities in Social Studies to course sequences and total dependence on the textbook (Brickell,1983:5). Unfortunately, cognitive addiction to the printed word in its current form deprives the student of those

essential survival tools the Social Studies curriculum was designed to provide. Specifically, those ingredients that permit the individual to find his/her place in the world.

Textbook difficiencies are directly attributed to their tendency to foster teaching and testing activities that do not encourage the use of thinking skills. For instance, Social Studies questions rarely inform the reader, either directly or by example, how to engage in specific thinking skills to arrive at correct answers. A survey of Social Studies curriculum models would point to the absence of the spiral or cyclical treatment that is supposed to link the Social Studies content from one grade level to another. For most school districts nationwide, the emphasis on this approach has yet to be introduced or tested. Instead, what is available are Social Studies subject matters that are taught in isolation. Even for those instructors who are bold enough to give their classrooms a thinking chance, the thinking skills they incorporate are not clearly defined. Thus, what most Social Studies instructors and curriculum designers have failed to realize is that " the development of thought should be regarded as a continuous stream rather than additive accretion of specific skills " (Taba,1964:174).

Rarely do senior high school students learn to adequately master such thinking skills as recall, comprehension, classification,

comparisons, analysis, synthesis, problem-solving and contrast. The presence or absence of these skills can make or break a student in college. Yet, they are ignored at the senior level when they ought to be taught a lot sooner- at the elementary level. Indeed, this is the crux of the favorable argument for infusing thinking skills into the Social Studies curriculum, grades K-12 (Zenger,1982:3). It is astonishing that this has not been more rigorously implemented in the past considering the enormous impact information systems as mass media and computers have had on society. These two by-products of social technology have revolutionized the thinking of our times to the point where it becomes incomprehensible that thinking skills are not introduced more frequently and for all content areas.

Perhaps more to the causes of the demise of Social Studies as a "relevant" field is best summed up in the words of James Davis who noted:

Social Studies has failed to communicate a broad and balanced social studies program which is crucially important to all levels of education. This failure has resulted in the narrow view of social studies in helping students examine political and social issues; to understand the influence of such problems as classism, racism, sexism...to help make national decisions about their private and public lives. Classes are mostly teacher-led and classroom-based (Davis,1983:22).

However Davis may have inspired curriculum designers, his

candid observations would be rendered useless if they failed to appeal to the larger community and the school district to which this proposal was being introduced. This is the first order of business in the revised curriculum proposal procedure.

Procedure for Social Studies
Curriculum Reform Proposal

A new proposal to revise a mainstreamed Social Studies curriculum, grades K-12, is usually burdened with a notorious misconception among its staff members, that the curriculum they are implementing is difficient. That, however, is not always the case. For the immediate concern here, revision is to be understood in terms of updating the curriculum, whether new concepts are introduced, old ones are deleted, or if the curriculum was modified.

In proposing to infuse thinking skills into the Social Studies curriculum, the plan here is to recommend an upgrade for old standards with new ideas. It would be academically suicidal to discard old standards that have worked, but equally crippling to ignore those that have not. The underlying disturbing factor is the absence of thinking skills activities in Social Studies instruction. The conviction of this proposal is that the "overpassing" attitude shared by the majority of school administrators when deciding on thinking activities needs to be reexamined. But, more significant is the unquestionable belief, that the current curriculum, unmanipulative in the most fundamental basics of thinking skills, will leave many students ill-prepared to meet the challenges of today's world.

If there is to be success in implementing this proposal, the professional planners cannot undermine the support of the

immediate community that will be affected by any curriculum change in their school district. They must be invited to participate and become actively involved in the revision process. Thus, with parents and citizens represented on the Planning Committee, the make-up should also include representation from the teachers, student groups, universities, businesses, labor, military and the State Board of Education (Brickell,1983:2).

For additional effective input, the committee can also request the involvement of textbook publishers. Any information they supply pertaining to the availability of thinking skills materials would be helpful. For instance, depending on what the textbook market has to offer, the committee would probably have to decide to order thinking skill supplements if textbooks with thinking skill activities are not in print.

Before the curriculum committee takes on the official capacity of studying and deciding the proposal's eight major steps, professional planners must be sure the number of representatives is large enough to break up the committee into twelve smaller subcommittees which represent each grade level. The only exception are those committee members representing kindergarten and first grade. They will be grouped together. Having garnered sufficient support, the committee's first decision is how to plan for the revised Social Studies curriculum? That is, planning to plan.

In attempting to assess a district-wide perceived need for

thinking skills activities in Social Studies acquisition, the committee would first contact the district's Social Studies staff in the form of a memo from the office of Superintendent. The communication will request that they take a look at their program and assess what they regard to be the program's weaknesses and strengths. The memo would also inform the teachers of the committee's proposal. Furthermore, if they agreed, as the committee states, that thinking skills activities were lacking in their program, any views they submitted to explain their method of incorporating thinking skills into the program would be welcomed. This contribution to the planning effort is important because it compels the committee to explain the valid basis for revising the curriculum (Davis,1983:39).

Having received and reviewed teacher feedback from the Social Studies staff, committee members will attempt to clarify their tasks on the curriculum committee. This stage is critical because it sets the pace of progress and productivity throughout the revision process. This self-monitoring device helps everyone involved stay on track. The committee is now prepared to decide on a rationale for revising the curriculum.

This stage requires all participants to explain why they are doing what they are doing. Teachers on the committee, particularly Social Studies teachers, are given the opportunity to make a philosophical statement about the nature of society, its past, present, future and its relationship to the current status

of Social Studies. The teachers will then list eight statements which he/she agrees are the most important functions of Social Studies. By the process elimination, each selects one that suits their situation best. Again, as a reminder, parents are invited to elicit their views on the subject because as mentioned earlier, their involvement is essential to the survival of the proposal.

A teacher statement that promotes a rationale can take on the following form:

Social Studies is the study of people, the social world and the human experience. The stuff of social studies is knowledge about humans and the social world, skills which help students understand more about people and society, and attitudes which help persons participate more effectively in their social interactions. Social studies students study the past, but they also examine the present and consider the future (Davis,1983:65).

Irrespective of the position teachers establish to justify their rationale, the planners pushing for thinking skills have no doubts about the expansive and elusive nature of Social Studies. That is why it cannot be taught all at once. The child must grow and mature into the field from the simplest concepts introduced in kindergarten to the more complex thoughts taught in senior years.

By incorporating thinking skills into the curriculum, success in Social Studies is measured in terms of the student's

sophistication and understanding of their sensitivities, attitudes and beliefs in themselves and others. In retrospect, Social Studies is a 13 year, K-12 cyclical or spiral endeavor, and not a series of one year classes. It ought to enhance learning environments where human development is a topic for direct, rather than incidental teaching, because without the students' purposeful and active preparation for the future, either as pupils or later as adults, they will be overwhelmed with uncertainties.

The committee is now prepared to take a close look at the proposal to determine what would be the intent of each course; In other words, how to go about selecting the overall objectives? It is during this crucial stage of the revision process that the planning committee is broken up into the 12 subcommittees. The subcommittee that is assigned to list K-1 objectives will be identified as sub. K-1; The subcommittee responsible for 10 grade objectives will be identified as sub-10....etc.

Each subcommittee will be asked to determine what they consider to be the top priorities of Social Studies teaching. As part of the student's total education, they are to keep in mind those skills and information worth teaching to make students more productive in their adult lives (Brickell,1983:8).

Whatever emerges from this intensive brainstorming session, it must be understood beforehand, that their stated overall objectives is to be timeless, specific, free of cultural bias and subject to modification, if necessary. Again, emphasising

the spiral approach, the subcommittees are responsible for addressing at least seven social roles as a start: The citizen, worker, consumer, family, friends, groups and self (Davis,1983: 65). Subcommittees are free to add other roles as they see fit. However, consistency dictated the selection of the seven mentioned here.

The topics for each role is spelled out in advance. If other topics have not been addressed to the conviction of the subcommittees, they are free to add them. To clarify this procedure, when sub-3 discusses the citizen role for third grade students, the governmental topics they will address as outlined for them, are: citizens of my city, citizens of my state and citizens of my nation. For grades K-1, the family role will address the topics of the family, family roles and family responsibilities...etc. (see role and topic samples on page 11).

Having completed this task, the subcommittees will be asked to incorporate thinking skills into the overall objectives; In other words, how for instance, to direct first grade students to use specific thinking skills to address the role of the citizen? Or, how to teach the consumer role to 8th grade students using appropriate thinking skills, and so on. Again, each subcommittee will be responsible for their own grade level.

The recommendation is to focus on the cognitive domain as outlined in the six categories of Benjamin Bloom's Taxonomy of Educational Objectives: knowledge, comprehension, application,

SAMPLE TOPICS FOR K-3 SOCIAL STUDIES*

	CITIZEN	WORKER	CONSUMER	FAMILY	FRIENDS	GROUPS	SELF
K-1	Rules Authority School Rules Laws applicable to children	School Worker Responsibilities Rules Satisfaction	How advertising influences: T.V. commercialism. advertisements in the mall. Making choices.	What is a family? Roles. Responsibilities. Rules Interdependence of members.	Need for friends: Playing with friends. Working with friends. Feeling about friends.	Groups humans form: Kinds of groups. Responsibilities in groups. Group rules.	What makes me special? Physical characteristics. abilities. feelings.
2nd	Citizen Participation: Protecting our environment: Wise personnel use of resources. Joining with others in cleanup. Choosing wise leaders.	Relationship of Geography to work How natural environment influences work choices. Variety of jobs in geographic areas. When natural environment causes workers to move.	Using natural resources: Paper from trees Conserving our use of paper	Family History: Ancestors Traditions Family influence on learning	Conflicts among friends Name calling. Exclusion Resolving conflicts.	Neighborhoods Effect of natural environment on neighborhoods. Working together on a neighborhood project Changing a neighborhood	How I am like others: Basic needs Basic wants Satisfying needs and wants
3rd	Governments Citizen of my city Citizen of my state Citizen of my nation	Need for work Satisfying personal needs Satisfying needs for goods Satisfying need for progress and problem solutions.	Functions of Money Using money to satisfy needs Buying Saving	Use of family Resources Family members as human resources Conserving energy at home. Resolving conflicts about resources	Making new friends Finding out about a new friend Telling a friend about yourself	Ethnic Groups Nature of ethnic groups Immigration and migration Traditions and customs	How I use my time Personal interests Personal responsibility. Making choices
		16	BEST COPY AVAILABLE		*Modification of Davis, 1983		17

analysis, synthesis and evaluation. It should be expected that some committee members, with some justification, might deem this approach inadequate or too general. They are free to recommend alternate thinking skills. After all, the aim at this stage is to identify the thinking skills the planning committee believes are most applicable to each grade level for teaching Social Studies.

Admittedly, concepts such as knowledge, comprehension, and application are sufficiently general to expect conflicting subcommittee interpretations. Again, for the sake of consistency, it is prudent to agree on a common set of definitions as one planning committee before breaking up into 12 confused subcommittees.

Knowledge is to be understood as the student's ability to recall information and cite in similar form. To illustrate, a student will use an outline map of Africa to place the name of the following climactic regions: Mediterranean, semi-arid, arid, dry and humid.

Comprehension is the student's ability to understand the literal meaning of the material, and his/her ability to either translate the material into another form or language. Reading and explaining the Declaration of Independence so that it is understood by fellow classmates, is one example. Also, under this category, students should be able to write a summary of opinions, generalizations and arguments on controversial issues, and to try to make predictions based on available information.

Application is the student's ability to select and use information to resolve a problem. This skill requires the student to use appropriate abstractions, laws, principles and applicable data to perform this task. The student, for example, can be asked to orally predict the conflicts between the functions of the executive, legislative and judicial branches of government under a hypothetical political crisis. The student can use the principles of separation of powers, and checks and balances as the basis for the oral presentation.

Analysis is a skill that requires the student to understand the literal meaning of a Social Studies information, and to be able to separate him/herself from the material in order to determine whether it does what it attempts to do. To that end, the student must be able to detect the underlying techniques, devices, biases, or frame of reference. In retrospect, analysis emphasises the breakdown of information to determine if the technique conveys a message, an overgeneralization or a falsehood; If there are relationships of parts (relevant and irrelevant information) and if the material is organized, such as, the author's point of view, implied audience and unstated purpose.

Synthesis involves divergent thinking, where answers cannot be fixed in advance. It requires students to recombine a given piece of information, and through imaginative and creative thinking, formulate a unique essay which is judged by quality. To illustrate, students can be given a goal-oriented assignment

which requires group cooperation. The students are asked to create a one-page outline for achieving the goal and present it to the group in question. Or, one student in the group can write a two page dialogue of arguments between two persons holding opposing views on a controversial subject, such as, America's involvement in Vietnam.

Evaluation is probably the most difficult to master because students must be mentally equipped to handle all previous categories mentioned. Here, students are required to make judgements about the value of something by using a set of student-selected criteria. For exercise, the student can be given two judicial systems from which he/she can select one to use in mock trials utilizing such characteristics as, method of selecting judges, use of bail, past and present judicial decisions reported in the mass media (Bruce, 1972:117).

Collectively, these six categories are to be viewed as part of a terminal objective to create effective student thinking skills in Social Studies courses (Zenger, 1982:15). If sub-3, for example, finds these proposed thinking skills too difficult for third year students, alternate skills, which they are convinced are more appropriate to that grade level, will be welcomed. Indeed, this process is primarily designed to solicit opposing views on the committee. These categories ought to incite constructive discussions and debates, particularly among psychologists on the committee, as they are not always in agreement

about the precise definition of effective thinking. This stage should be instrumental in committing what the majority of committee members can agree are the appropriate thinking skills in Social Studies, in writing. Needless to say, because of the controversial nature of this topic, this process will take time. Once completed, the planning committee can concentrate on mapping the content of the Social Studies curriculum.

Here, the subcommittees will still be needed to formulate a conceptualized content framework which incorporate the thinking skills they have already agreed upon. It is recommended that they first review the content pattern of their current Social Studies program. Perhaps upon closer scrutiny, they may decide to implement additional adjustments and order new textbooks. Possibly, the committee could lean toward retaining current textbooks and introduce a thinking skills supplement. All possibilities ought to be considered.

If the committee retains current Social Studies themes, the next assignment is to find ways of injecting their objectives into those patterns. Once the content has been mapped out, the subcommittees should have an idea what the scope of the program should look like.

At this phase, the committee is prepared to accept additional input from other committee members, particularly parents and other citizens. Having completed the necessary alterations, the subcommittees can now decide on the choices of

the content that best meets their objectives. However, like it or not, the choices must conform to the content laws, which are mandated by state and local education policies. Here, input from state and local representatives can prove invaluable. Once content choice has been established to be in compliance with the law, the subcommittees can take on the challenging task of choosing the materials appropriate to each class.

At least six factors will play essential parts in the selection process. The subcommittees will consider if the material they chose, relates to their program objectives, student interest, appropriate grade level of difficulty, program content, teacher needs, and whether a budget can be approved to afford the materials needed for program implementation. Upon completion, the subcommittees can plan to program for their self-evaluation.

This step is a monitoring procedure to ascertain the subcommittees are staying on track. This is achieved by checking that their overall specific thinking objectives are clearly understood; That the program they selected is continuous and cumulative, and it is indeed monitored through records kept by administrators, teachers, and students (Davis,1983:207). Finally, targeting for a post-evaluation date , which is three years from the date of implementation, is very adviseable. After the three year experimental period, the committee will once again regroup to determine if the program has worked.

Comparing achievement scores before and after the implementation of thinking skills is one device that can be used . Also, an attempt should be made to survey overall student responses to the new thinking methods, whether they are favorable or unfavorable. Hence, if all eight revision procedures are successfully achieved, then chances for program implementation, although not guaranteed, are better.

Implementation of Social Studies Revised Curriculum

The end of the curriculum revision brainstorming sessions is hardly a mark of success. Making it into the classrooms is for the curriculum's future- just that, making it to the classroom! Implementation has much to do with the conviction of the community, the local education board and the Social Studies staff, that the revised curriculum they are about to improvise has a chance to succeed, and is worth experimenting with.

This revised Social Studies curriculum, which invokes thinking skills, can also be scrapped before it reaches the classroom. As alluded to earlier, many teachers are not professionally trained to teach thinking skills. This should not be a reflection on the instructor's intelligence or professionalism. Teachers cannot be totally faulted for the system's failure to train them with such skills in the first place. In that vein of concern, it would make sense to suggest in-service training sessions for Social Studies instructors to help them implement the approved revised curriculum.

For more than just learning the teaching techniques, the in-service training will help clear up ambiguities and misconceptions teachers may have about thinking skills, and how it ought to be taught (Beyer, 1985:487). The inservice will also encourage the instructors to be more receptive to the use of thinking skill aids beyond the textbook. Computers

and games, for examples, have their benefits to developing thinking skills. Games involve social reasoning, social problem-solving and helps to reinforce certain Social Studies concepts. It also provides students with motivation feedback (Bereiter,1984:76).

The most important lesson instructors can learn from their inservice training is that their students will have to be treated a lot more than consumers of information in order to become critical thinkers. However, before students can be taught to think critically, teachers must understand the thinking process (Baldwin,1984: 79).

Ideally, the inservice sessions should take as long as needed, and the three year experimentation phase should be counted after in-service training, and counting from the first date of implementation throughout the school district.

Again, the word experiment is underscored here, because it represents a safety valve for citizens, that this revised curriculum isn't just another bureaucratic scheme for raising taxes to support another useless program. Residents have to be convinced that what is being suggested here is indeed needed. The three year time limit is the proposal's strength because citizens can eliminate it if they perceive it to be a waste of their tax dollars after the "probation" period.

The belief here is that residents will vote for any program
not
that they/only perceive as useful, but also if they feel it is

a program they are in charge of. Parents and citizens are not only the school district's largest clients, they are also the backbone that can make or break this revised curriculum for Social Studies , grades K-12.

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